



Marriage Enrichment: The Lifestyle of Being a Life-Long Learner

A good fisherman never tires of learning about fishing. An avid scrap-booker is eager to learn new ways to make things cute or meaningful. A good spouse is defined less by their current skills and abilities and more by their willingness to be a continual learner of their partner. A skilled spouse who grows lazy or distracted will soon live in a deteriorating marriage. A spouse with below average marriage skills who is consistently learning about their partner will experience the encouragement of steady marital improvement and a deepening affection for their spouse.

This has a simple, yet profound, implication – a good marriage is a lifestyle, not something you “finish.” As you go through these seminars, remember you are learning a gospel-centered way of life that blesses and gives life to your marriage, not a few biblically-based techniques to be activated when needed or turned back on when a problem arises.

Unless you think this way, you will create a cycle of being discouraged by hope. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that marital effort is only triggered by marital crisis and that “better” is only a temporary word that responds to guilt or fear. Protect your marriage from this trap by approaching these seminars with the mindset of embracing a lifestyle.

These seminars are written to facilitate this kind of lifestyle change. While the seminars are topical, they are highly inter-related. This interconnection is designed to protect you from studying this material as a collection of helpful concepts, suggestions, and techniques.

- What you learn in “Foundations” must be expressed in communication, finances, decision making, and intimacy.
- What you learn in “Communication” builds off what you learn in foundations and is vital for implementing the skills you gain in finances, decision making, and intimacy.
- What you learn in “Budgeting” will assume a solid foundation and ability to communicate while setting the stage for decision making and greater intimacy.
- What you learn in “Decision Making” will be the most practical unpacking of foundations, communication, and budgeting, and be great protection for intimacy.
- What you learn in “Intimacy” will be celebration and fruit of what you worked for as you applied foundations, communication, budgeting, and decision making.

The lifestyle of being a life-long learner will continually reinforce two key truths about marriage and your spouse. First, your spouse is different from you in ways that have no moral significance. Yet, the closeness of marriage tempts us to begin to think of our spouse’s differences as being “bad.” This reveals our tendency to try to “make our spouse in our own image.” It also reveals that we’ve lost the enthusiasm to learn about the person God has blessed us with.

“Worshipping God as creator in your marriage means that when you look at your husband or wife, when you consider your spouse’s personality and gifts, and when you think about how differently he or she is hardwired from you, you will celebrate the glory of God as creator, expressed in who he designed your spouse to be (p. 279).” Paul Tripp in *What Did You Expect?*

The exercise “Celebrating Non-Moral Marital Differences” (found on the next page) is designed to help you think through and talk about this common marital pitfall. If you have been married for a number of years, a fruitful exercise is to use this chart to see how you and your spouse have changed over your marriage. In addition to marking where you are now, mark where each of you were on these variables when you married. Use a blue highlighter to cover the range between where the husband began and is now. Use a pink highlighter to mark the range between where the wife began and is now.

Second, your spouse is being continually crafted by God, and you must continually pay attention or you’ll get left behind. Because we will be married to dozens of people over the course of a single marriage, we must commit to a lifestyle of learning our spouse, or we’ll be as out-of-touch as someone with a cell phone from five years ago. A huge part of creating a gospel-centered marriage is enthusiasm for learning and participating in what God is doing in/through your spouse’s life.



Celebrating Our Non-Moral Marital Differences

Introduction: The longer we are married, the easier it can be to view the ways our spouse is different from us as "bad" (moral language) or as a sign of incompatibility (threatening language). This exercise is meant to help you see and celebrate the non-moral differences between you and your spouse. The attributes listed are neither morally good nor morally bad. Neither side nor the center is necessarily "holy." If you view these characteristics as moral qualities it will be harmful to your marriage. Your responsibility is to celebrate how God made your spouse and put the gospel on display finding ways to express loving unity in the midst of non-moral diversity.

Instructions: Write your initials where you believe you are on each spectrum. Write your spouse's initials where you believe he/she is on each spectrum. Compare your assessment with your spouse's assessment. Talk about (a) ways the two of you have viewed your differences as "bad" and this has caused conflict, (b) ways that your differences compliment one another well, and (c) how you have changed over the last few years.

Attribute	Scale	Attribute
Extrovert	_____	Introvert
Bold	_____	Timid
Calm	_____	Excitable
Reserved	_____	Expressive
Optimistic	_____	Pessimistic
Flexible	_____	Structured
Logical	_____	Emotional
Athletic	_____	Non-Athletic
Loud	_____	Quiet
Sentimental	_____	Stoic
Outdoors	_____	Indoors
Trusting	_____	Cautious
Detailed	_____	Generalizer
Organized	_____	Disorganized
Confident	_____	Insecure
Spender	_____	Saver
Conventional	_____	Unconventional
Leader	_____	Follower
Punctual	_____	Non-punctual
Aggressive	_____	Passive

Modified and adapted from *Preparing for Marriage God's Way* by Wayne Mack (p. 11)